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Old-Time New England

THE BULLETIN OF

The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

The Old Meeting-House, Lebanon, Connecticut

AS LEFT BY THE HURRICANE OF SEPTEMBER 21, 1938

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JANUARY, 1940

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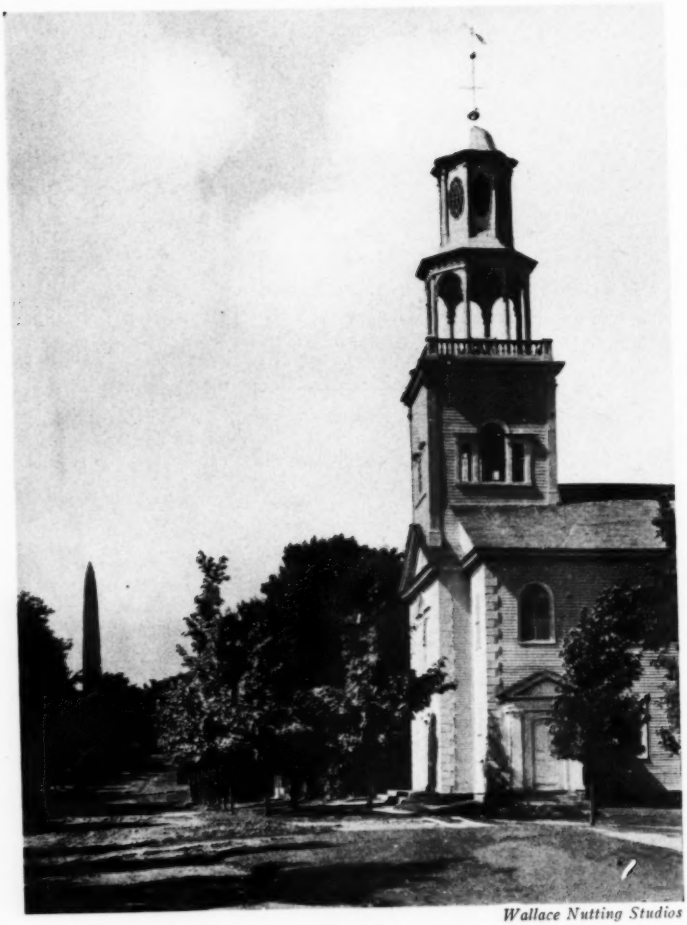

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First Church, Bennington, Vermont

BUILT IN 1805 AFTER DESIGNS BY ASHER BENJAMIN

Old-Time New England

THE BULLETIN OF

The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
DEVOTED TO THE ANCIENT BUILDINGS, HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS, DOMESTIC ARTS, MANNERS AND CUSTOMS, AND MINOR ANTIQUITIES OF THE NEW ENGLAND PEOPLE

Volume XXX JANUARY, 1940 *Number* 3

Restoration of The Old First Church of Bennington, Vermont

Built 1805 — Dedicated January 1, 1806

Restoration Completed June, 1937
Dedicated as Vermont's Colonial Shrine August 15, 1937

BY REV. VINCENT RAVI BOOTH, D.D.

ALL Benningtonians know that the first meeting-house of Bennington stood on what is now the village green, on the spot marked by the First Meeting-House monument, erected in 1923 through the generosity of Mrs. Elinor W. Squier.

All Benningtonians know that the first meeting-house of Bennington was the first Protestant church to be erected in the New Hampshire Grants; that it was built in 1763-65, the first settlers having arrived on June 18, 1761. The first meeting-house was a house of government as well as a house of God. Eight times the legislature met under its roof. Stirring scenes, some pregnant with disaster, others vibrant with joy, were enacted within its walls. It stood for almost forty years, but it is doubtful whether it was ever completed. Travellers passing through Bennington described it as "a dilapidated structure owing to apparent neglect and decay."

At the close of the eighteenth century a new meeting-house was much needed, but the records show that its erection was preceded by a protracted struggle, one of the recurrent Battles of Bennington. This one lasted for eleven years. However, by 1803 the battle was won, and by February 14, 1804, the people of Bennington had appointed a building committee, and a building agent-in-chief.

Who was the architect, and who the builder? There is not the slightest doubt that the builder started out with Asher Benjamin's book on architecture, entitled, *The Country Builder's Assistant.* This book was published in Greenfield, Massa-

chusetts, in 1805, the year in which this church was built. Among the drawings in Benjamin's book is one which bears so close a resemblance to this church that it is unbelievable that the builder did not have the volume before him.

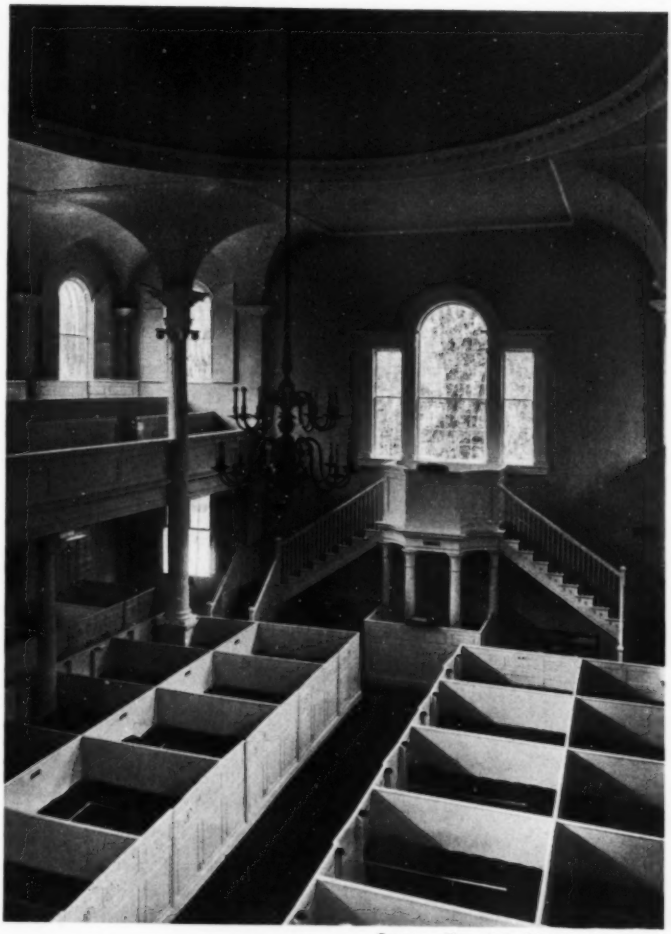
But Asher Benjamin was only the starting point. The builder had his own ideas which he did not hesitate to incorporate in the structure. This is particularly true of the interior. Benjamin's design showed a two-story arrangement of columns—the lower row supporting the balcony and the second helping support the ceiling and roof trusses. The magnificent arrangement of groined vaults at the sides over the galleries in the four corners of the building, together with the cruciform arrangement of flat ceiling and shallow saucer-dome over the crossing, is both novel and decidedly pleasing. The columns are arranged with due regard for the spacing of the windows, an idea which is not carried out in Benjamin's original design. The windows on the second story are arched, evidently to follow the curve of the vaulting. This adds interest to the exterior as well as more truly expressing the arrangement of the interior. The tower is a copy from Benjamin's design, but with a decided improvement at the junction of the octagonal colonnade with the lantern above. Certainly the people of Bennington secured the services of a master builder!

Who was the man whose name has disappeared from the records of Bennington? I am able to answer this question, thanks to the records kept in Middlebury, Vermont. Lavius Fillmore was his name. He was born in Norwich, Connecticut, in October, 1767, and went to Middlebury as early as 1796. He was second cousin of Millard Fillmore, the 13th president of the United States. The Monroe-Hawkins house in South Shaftsbury was designed and built by Fillmore.

The year after this church was built Gamaliel Painter, whose name appears on one of the pulpit tablets as the founder of Middlebury College, engaged Lavius Fillmore to build the meeting-house for the town of Middlebury. Fillmore reproduced in Middlebury the structure which he had just completed in Bennington, only on a larger scale. The comparative cost of the two buildings tells the story. The Bennington church cost $7,000; the Middlebury church $9,000. This shows how the value of a dollar had depreciated in one hundred and thirty-one years, for the contractor who did the work of restoration on this building told me that it would now cost approximately $100,000 to reproduce it.

Lavius Fillmore must have been a man of unusual vision and marked ability. Witness this structure with its unique interior and steeple; then go to Middlebury and look at the exquisite tower he built there, closely resembling the steeple of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields facing Trafalgar Square in London.

As the restoration proceeded, the frame of this building was carefully examined for decay and weakness and was found to be as sound as it was when built. Every beam and truss was designed to carry a much greater weight than will ever rest upon it. The six columns supporting the ceiling were once six white pines growing in the forest primeval. Each column, or support, is in one piece, extending from the foundation through the ceiling to the trusses above. The round column is raised on a square pedestal of about the height of the pew backs, and at the top, above the column capital—which has an individuality all its own—the post is surrounded by a square classical entablature,



Courtesy Van Anda Studios, New York

First Church of Bennington

VIEW TOWARDS PULPIT, AFTER RESTORATION

the cornice of which lines with the cornice around the piers placed against the outside wall between the arched windows. From the top of this entablature spring the plaster arches, which are so pleasing an element in the design of the interior. The contractor tells me that such lumber can no longer be purchased at any price.

I shall not attempt to outline the story of the alterations carried out on this structure beginning with 1840, when the Benjamin pulpit and the box-pews were eliminated. Four times this building has been altered and modernized. The most deplorable alterations were made in 1865, at the close of the Civil War.

On the one hundred and fifty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington, August 15, 1932, the minister of this church delivered an address in which he proposed a faithful restoration of this building, and stated that such a program would involve the following alterations:

The elimination of the apse housing the massive walnut pulpit; the restoration of the four windows in the east wall by the removal of the two chimneys blocking them; the restoration of the Palladian window back of the pulpit. In addition, the minister recommended the restoration of the Asher Benjamin pulpit and the forty-eight box-pews on the floor of the church; also rebuilding the partition-wall between the auditorium and the vestibule so as to re-align aisles and doors as they were before the structure was altered. He recommended that the south entrance be closed, and that the window and the stairs, which were removed to make that entrance possible, be rebuilt. He suggested that all the modern doors—three in the facade and three in the vestibule—be replaced with copies of the originals, together with their strap-hinges, and that the fan-light over the main entrance, boarded up to avoid broken glass, be reopened. In the west gallery he suggested that the organ be removed in order that the arched window back of it, and the mutilated cross in the ceiling might again take their place in the architectural scheme.

This program was carried out to the last detail. In fact, we did more—much more. And hereby hangs a tale. One morning in January, 1937, the foreman on this job, Edward Switzgable, made the important discovery that originally there were twenty-three box-pews in the gallery, ten in the north, ten in the south and three in the west. The evidence was complete and indisputable. In addition, in front of the box-pews ran a massive single pew—circular in the west balcony. This circular pew was removed at some unknown date. The straight front pews in the north and south gallery are original, never having been disturbed.

The twenty-three box-pews in the gallery were rebuilt, and a copy of the circular pew restored. The material that went into the panelling of the twenty box-pews in the north and south balconies is the original material, having fortunately been preserved in the following manner: When eliminated, the sections of the box-pews were carefully taken apart and used as backs for the two straight pews which took their place, running the entire length of both north and south galleries. Each section is divided into two panels, the upper one short, the lower quite high. The natural place for the seat of the new pew was at the juncture of the two panels. If the sections had been erected in the same relative position as when they were the sides of box-pews, the new seat would have been much too high from the floor. Each section, therefore, was turned upside down; what was the upper panel be-

came the lower panel, and vice versa. Thus the seat was kept at the proper height from the floor.

This fact explains why the scores of initials and caricatures cut in the panels were all upside down until we righted the sections. I had noticed this fact years ago and had sought for an explanation. The most plausible guess was that the straight pews in the gallery had been built with material taken from the first meeting-house when it was demolished, and this material used in haphazard fashion. But the guess was wrong. It remained for Mr. Switzgable to get at the facts.

Worked into the backs of the straight pews we found two original pew doors bearing the numbers 7 and 8 respectively, the number inclosed in an oval design. It is interesting to know that the same type of number and oval is found on the box-pew doors of King's Chapel in Boston. The architect made a tracing of these two numbers and reproduced the numerals from one to ten. This numerical alphabet was used to paint the numbers on the pew doors, which means that the design of ovals and numerals is identical with the originals.

For several decades the unmarried men in the community sat in the north, and the unmarried women in the south gallery. If you will examine the women's gallery you will find that it is in perfect condition. Not a scratch is to be found anywhere. Evidently young women a hundred years ago did not carry jack-knives.

But even a glance at the men's gallery will convince you that they carried jack-knives, and used them savagely. Chunk after chunk is hacked away from seats and panels. Caricatures of animals and human beings appear here and there. Scores of initials are cut deep, and some of the lettering is very neatly done. The most interesting inscription is a scripture reference—"Matthew 23:8—13 verse." Look it up, and this is what you will find: "But be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ: and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the Kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourself, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

Evidently up in that gallery a hundred years ago sat a young rebel, entering his silent protest against the cant and boredom of decadent Puritanism. I have made it my business to read several of the interminable sermons preached in New England pulpits a hundred years ago. The sermon preached at the dedication of this church one hundred and thirty-four years ago has been preserved. After reading it, I do not wonder that young men brought their jack-knives to church and hacked away at panels and seats! Those mutilated panels are an eloquent human document.

Thanks to a photograph of the choir taken from the pulpit seventy-five years ago, now in the possession of a member of this church, we made another interesting discovery. In this photograph high panelling appears in the west balcony around the stair-wells. This set me to digging, and soon it was ascertained that there were two long and narrow box-pews over the stair-wells reserved for Negro servants. The panelling of these pews was nearly seven feet high, so that

the Negro servants might come to church, but they could neither see nor be seen.

The constitution adopted by Vermont when the state came into existence forbade slavery. Legalized slavery never existed in the New Hampshire Grants. Nevertheless, indented Negro servants were not unknown in these parts. Governor Robinson had nine in his household.

Both Negro pews were restored and in them are now housed the sound cabinets of a new electric organ one can hear but cannot see. The console is in the middle box-pew of the west balcony. Once more the Negro pews conceal something vital. The electric organ made possible the restoration of the west balcony. Again the arched window lets in the light, and the old doors lead to the steeple. Again the cross in the ceiling stands out in its full length.

The church was wired for electricity in the most approved manner, eliminating danger of short circuit and fire. Every wire runs through a steel pipe, insuring complete insulation.

In the photograph mentioned above appears a three-branched chandelier hanging from the center of the dome. Research brought out the fact that on great occasions the chandelier of the near-by court-house was borrowed and hung in this church. When the court-house was destroyed by fire the chandelier went with it. Because of the information derived from that photograph, a beautiful pewter chandelier was hung in the center of the dome.

Before her death, Miss Hubbell repeatedly told me that as a rule the church was illuminated in olden times with tallow candles; that each household made its own candles, and that the best ones were saved for the meeting-house.

When we were tearing up the floor of the west balcony we came across one of the original pewter candle-holders. It is badly battered, but complete, and is worthy of a place in the Bennington museum. The saucer is covered with melted tallow. Embedded in the tallow are five spent wicks. This original candle-holder was faithfully reproduced in pewter by T. F. McGann and Sons of Boston, specialists in architectural and sculptural bronze; one hundred were installed, two in each box-pew on the floor of the church, and four in the lower pulpit. Again candle-light services may be held as of old.

In 1865 two furnaces were installed in the cellar to replace stoves under the gallery. Why this church was not destroyed long ago by overheated stoves and inadequate furnaces is hard to understand! Danger of fire from this source has been reduced to the minimum by the installation of the most modern hot air system, costing $4,000. Two powerful automatic electric fans keep the air of this building in constant circulation.

In my recommendations for the restoration, I suggested that the Sunday School room be demolished so that the rear of the building might be returned to its original condition, and that a new chapel be built at some distance back of the church. This was found to be impracticable.

It was estimated that the restoration would cost $30,000. We raised $34,897. This figure includes $230 contributed by Vermont societies for memorial flags, and $282 contributed by the state of Vermont for a bronze tablet.

How was this done? First of all a brochure on the Old First Church with twenty-six illustrations was published. The aim was to make it a perfect example of what a brochure should be, and the end was attained. The first copy went to

Courtesy Van Anda Studios, New York

First Church of Bennington

SHOWING RESTORED READING-DESK AND PULPIT

Calvin Coolidge. By return mail he invited me to Northampton. I spent the morning of December 27, 1932, with him discussing the plan. He advised me to consult the thoughtful men and women of the state and ascertain their reactions. Three days later he wrote me a letter confirming his oral advice. Five days after writing that letter he was stricken and died.

I spent two years going up and down the state of Vermont showing Calvin Coolidge's letter to the leading men and women in the state, covering in my car approximately five thousand miles. During those two years two hundred and fifty of the most respected Vermonters and lovers of Vermont endorsed that letter with their signatures.

Armed with this document, I plunged into the effort of raising $30,000, which undertaking Calvin Coolidge had told me was hopeless because of the financial depression through which the country was passing. Twice I went to Miami Beach to see Mr. Henry W. Putnam, Bennington's great benefactor. Both times he gave me a patient hearing. In May, 1934, he called on me, and offered $10,000 on condition that by August 17, 1936—two years later—an additional $20,000 should be subscribed and collected. He forthwith deposited his $10,000 in the County National Bank. As long as I live I shall entertain for Mr. Putnam the deepest sentiments of gratitude and affection. Without his powerful aid there would have been no restoration.

Before the summer of 1934 was over five persons subscribed $1,000 each. I shall not call them by name, but I want them to know that their names are inscribed on the tablets of my heart.

In that address made on the one hundred and fifty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington, I suggested that twenty tablets be erected in the restored church, each bearing an honored name in Vermont history. We have done something much more significant. One hundred and twenty-one names have been honored in this restored building. The Palladian window in the east wall has been restored in honor of the Putnam family, and one hundred and ninety-eight persons have participated with contributions in this tribute. The Asher Benjamin pulpit has been restored in memory of eleven men and women who have made a distinct contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of Vermont. Each name represents a gift of $200. The minister's pew has been restored in memory of the first ten ministers of the church; the governor's pew in memory of the five governors of Vermont buried in the churchyard. The remaining forty-six pews on the main floor of the church record the names of sixty-one Vermonters or lovers of Vermont. They are inscribed on metal plates attached to the pews. The six doors —three in the facade and three in the vestibule—are dedicated to the memory of six women who have invested their life in keeping open the doors of some church in Vermont. The plate on the center front door reads as follows:

IN MEMORIAM MARCY LEONARD
ROBINSON
CO-FOUNDER WITH CAPTAIN SAMUEL ROBINSON
OF BENNINGTON. THIS CHURCH
WAS ORGANIZED
IN THEIR HOME.

Eighteen descendants of Marcy Robinson, scattered from California to Maryland, contributed $200 for that memorial door.

The communion table, discarded in 1859, but fortunately preserved, bears the name of an honored minister of this church, Dr. Isaac Jennings.

The communion cabinet, in which are kept the pewter and the silver communion services formerly in use, is a memorial to Annette O. Jennings.

The west window in the balcony is dedicated to the memory of Catherine Bingham Hull, mother of the architect who did this perfect job of restoration.

The United States flag was presented by the Vermont Society of New York in memory of Chester Alan Arthur, a Vermonter, twenty-first president of the United States. The Vermont State flag was presented by the Vermont Association of Boston in memory of Calvin Coolidge, a Vermonter, thirtieth President of the United States.

A committee of historians devoted one year to the selection of twenty names of Vermonters considered by them to be the most meritorious names in the history of the state. These twenty names appear on two tablets under the caption — Vermont's Roll of Honor.

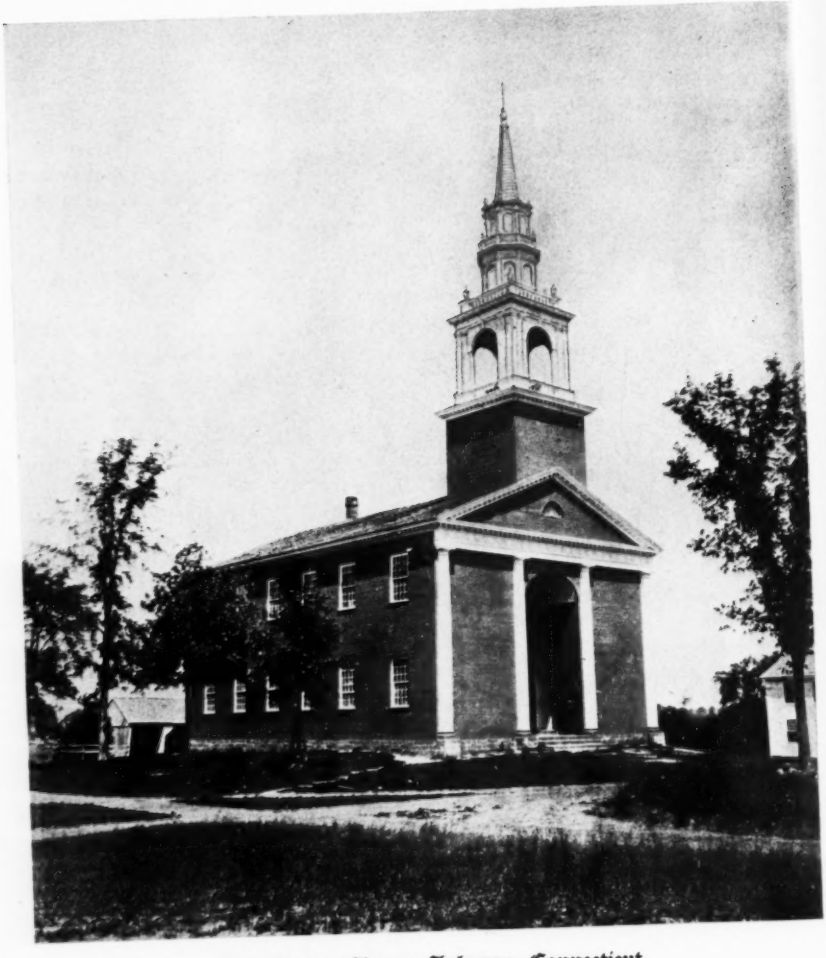
Thus the twenty names first proposed grew to one hundred and twenty-one.

By means of these memorials we secured $4,897 more than the $20,000 stipulated by Mr. Putnam, bringing up the total to $34,897. Not a single pledge secured since this effort began was cancelled or discounted. Every pledge was paid in full and well ahead of the expiration of the time limit. The number of pledges was one hundred and fifty-seven. The number of donors represented by these pledges was four hundred and eighteen.

On December 11, 1935, the Vermont Legislature, by joint resolution of House and Senate, unanimously declared the Old First Church of Bennington and the church-yard, to be Vermont's Colonial Shrine for the preservation of the sacred memories and traditions of Colonial days.

On February 10, 1937, the Vermont Legislature, by unanimous vote of House and Senate, enacted a bill appropriating $282 to be expended on a bronze tablet bearing the Joint Resolution of December 11, 1935, this tablet to be erected on the exterior of this church facing the cemetery. On August 15, 1937, the one hundred and sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of Bennington, when the church was dedicated as Vermont's Colonial Shrine, the tablet was unveiled with appropriate exercises.

Thus was this undertaking, seemingly so forbidding and apparently impossible, carried through to a finish.



Old Meeting-House, Lebanon, Connecticut

BUILT 1804–6

The Old Meeting-House at Lebanon, Connecticut

By Rev. Howard Crull Champe

A SAD calamity caused by the Great Hurricane of September 21, 1938, was the destruction of one of Connecticut's cherished historic landmarks—the stately and graceful brick meeting-house built in 1804-5-6 in Lebanon. The lovely steeple was shining in resplendent glory, as it had just been painted and the clock hands and numerals gold-leafed, the work having been completed on the Friday preceding the storm. One thousand dollars had been spent during the previous year on repairs, interior and exterior decoration, and the installation of a water system. Workmen had been engaged and materials were on hand for other repairs. Then came the storm! The tall spire rocked and swayed in the wind until its ancient timbers could no longer resist the furies of the gale and it fell full length on the roof. The terrific impact smashed the heavy trusses of the roof like jackstraws and caused the side walls to collapse, burying themselves almost out of sight in the water-soaked earth. Only the facade remained to perpetuate the one-time beauty and glory of this erstwhile document of American architecture.

With the loss of its meeting-house, the members of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon were faced with the problem of erecting a church building adequate merely for the present-day religious and social needs of the community, or of attempting to reconstruct the beautiful landmark which had graced the village green for over a century and a quarter. Mindful of an all-compelling responsibility to perpetuate a proud heritage and preserve for posterity such a rich example of early Republican architecture, they decided to try to restore in its original form this ancient citadel of the Lord and historic monument of patriotism.

This was the only edifice remaining in America which had been designed by the skilful amateur architect, Colonel John Trumbull, native son, patriot and painter of the Revolution, and aide-de-camp of General Washington. Trumbull had gone to London to study art, but soon after arriving there, under the excitement caused by the execution of Major Andre, he was arrested and imprisoned eight months. While in England, Edmund Burke urged Trumbull "to acquaint himself with architecture, as there would evidently be a great demand in America for that kind of knowledge."

This unique shrine of taste, piety and patriotism should not be allowed to pass away. It is proposed to reconstruct the old edifice in all its beauty according to the original plans drawn prior to 1804 by Colonel John Trumbull, using for this purpose as much as possible of the lovely detail of the wrecked church. As originally constructed the church had at its pulpit end a beautiful Palladian window, a high pulpit below it, a gallery on each side of the church, and box-pews. In the nineteenth century all of this was removed and now it is proposed to put it all back in the restored church.

What more appropriate town than Lebanon for the location of such a shrine! For Lebanon is a name with which to conjure. Here, truly, was the cradle of liberty in Connecticut. Here burned most fiercely the flames of self-determination and independence; and here, too, were enacted memorable scenes in the mighty drama that marked the years from Concord and Lexington to Yorktown. Lebanon was the center of communications between the northern and southern military forces; the granary and supply sta-

Lebanon Meeting-House

WRECKED BY THE HURRICANE OF SEPTEMBER 21, 1938

tion for Washington's army in the north; the headquarters of the Council of Safety; the camp-site of the troops of Rochambeau and the Duc de Lauzun.

Her own stalwart son, the first colonial governor (1769–1784) to espouse the colonists' cause, "Brother Jonathan" Trumbull, had achieved eminence as a leader in the revolution, receiving the distinguished confidence of Washington. And Lebanon came to know intimately the great men of the day—Lafayette, Rochambeau, the Duc de Lauzun, and General Washington himself.

Many of the patriots of the Revolution who had taken such a vital part in the affairs of the previous church were still active when our now demolished church was erected. The church owns the pewter communion set which was given by "Brother Jonathan" Trumbull in 1753. His son, Jonathan, Jr., Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, United States Senator, Lieutenant-Governor and Governor of Connecticut (1797–1809), was moderator of most of the meetings which made arrangements for the construction of the new building.

Seventy-year-old William Williams, then a venerable judge of the county court, was still able to display the fiery patriotism which prompted him to sign the Declaration of Independence. For taking an active part in the "Meeting House War" he was arrested by the local constable and spent a day in custody.

We mention again John Trumbull, designer of the church, who was famous for his paintings of the scenes depicting

Lebanon Meeting-House

SHOWING EFFECTS OF THE HURRICANE, SEPTEMBER 21, 1938

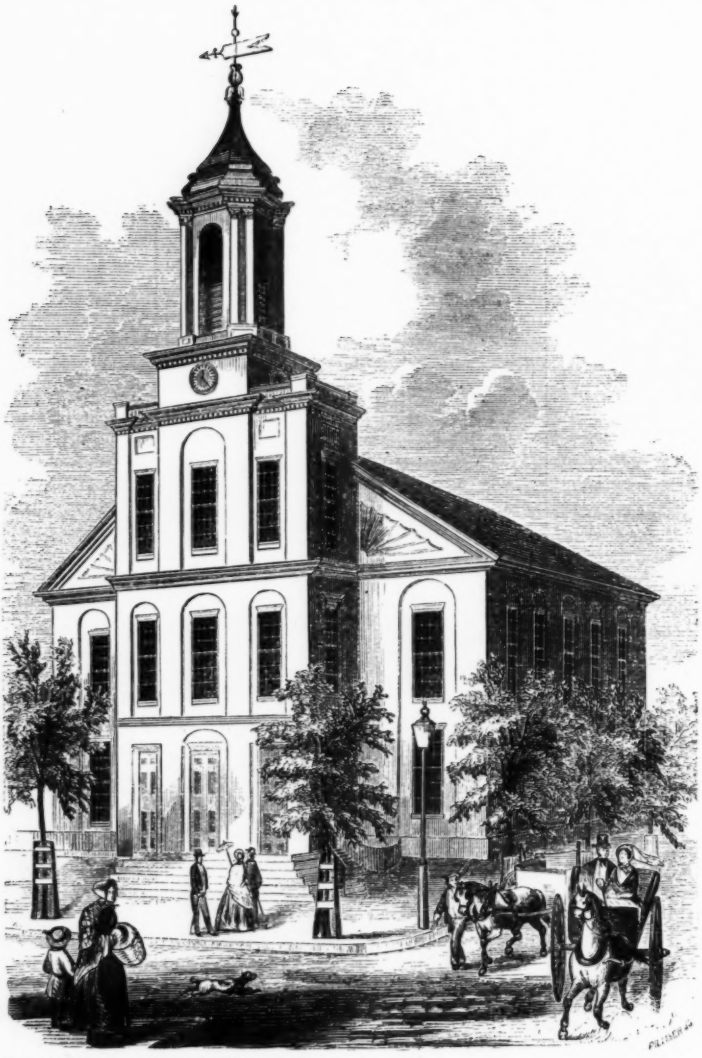
the early history of our country and for his portraits of famous men.

The Civil War governor of the state, Hon. William A. Buckingham, was born in Lebanon and was a liberal contributor to the church. Five governors of Connecticut came from Lebanon and they served in that capacity for a total of thirty-seven years. No wonder the people of the town were accustomed to boast: "We supply Norwich with butter and cheese and the state with governors, especially when they want good ones."

Once again the people of Lebanon have dedicated themselves to a patriotic endeavor. But lashed by the fury of the hurricane, willing though they might be, Lebanon's citizens cannot hope to finance the restoration of the church when ruined crops, razed homes and barns, ruined orchards and woodlots, have brought distraction and distress to the community.

There is abundant and encouraging evidence that loyal citizens of New England will consider it a privilege to extend financial assistance in restoring a meeting-house whose loss should be considered a national calamity.* The Norwich Savings Society, Norwich, Connecticut, is generously acting as Custodian of Funds for the new church. Contributions may be sent to that institution, or to Clarence G. Geer, Treasurer, or to the Rev. H. C. Champe, pastor of the church, Lebanon, Connecticut.

* The cost of restoring any ancient building is always greater than the cost of new construction. Absolute fidelity to the original plan and to the design of mouldings, carving and cabinet work is essential, requiring an extraordinary amount of architectural research and the skill of the most expert workmen. However, the measurements and data which are available make it possible accurately to restore the old meeting-house without resort to guesswork. The most reliable architects and contractors who have carefully estimated the cost of reconstruction place the figure at approximately $75,000.



Reproduction from *Gleason's Pictorial*, 1853.

Charles Street Meeting-House, Boston

BUILT IN 1807 AFTER DESIGNS BY ASHER BENJAMIN

The Charles Street Meeting-House, Boston

By John Gardner Greene

I

THE Charles Street Meeting-House was built in 1807 to be the home of the Third Baptist Church. The Baptist denomination in New England had grown during the previous decades with extraordinary rapidity. For example, we are told that in 1765 there were only thirty-two Baptist churches in the six districts afterwards known as the New England states. But a generation afterwards, in 1795, the denomination had grown so rapidly that it had some three hundred and thirty churches with a membership of twenty-two thousand. Furthermore, the seizure by the "liberals" of most of the parish churches in certain parts of New England, notably Eastern Massachusetts, made it easier for an evangelical denomination, such as the Baptist, to attract many of the more conservative believers from the churches that everywhere in New England, save in Rhode Island, were known as churches of the Standing Order.

Boston, the centre of Unitarianism, was no exception to the rule. Unitarianism was at its apogee in that city during the early years of the nineteenth century; but at the same time, the Baptists already had two churches, both in the North End. In the fall of 1803, at the height of Unitarian successes, a remarkable "work of grace" began in these two Baptist churches. As a result, their congregations grew to such an extent that another church building was thought necessary.

Just a few years earlier, Harrison Gray Otis and a number of other energetic gentlemen had formed a "syndicate" which bought the Copley pasture on the western slope of Beacon Hill. This "syndicate" then proceeded to lay out what would now be called a real-estate development. It prospered, and by the time the Baptists were thinking of expanding, the western slope of the Hill was being settled by a large and prosperous number of people, including some members of the Baptist denomination.

The Baptists determined to erect a church building in that district. The two churches in the North End, although situated near each other, had different types of ministers and congregations, and both were flourishing. Neither congregation wished to move as a whole, so the obvious solution was reached of founding a new congregation and erecting a new building for it. In 1807 these things were done. Baptists who lived in or near the western part of the Hill separated in love from the older congregations, after due consultation with them, and formed one of their own, known as the Third Baptist Church in Boston. This name was given in apparent disregard of the formation in 1805 of a colored congregation known as the African—later the Independent—Baptist Church. Possibly the Baptists felt justified in thus ignoring the existence of a church of humbler people when they reflected that in the seventeenth century their own first church had been ignored by the founders of the "Old South," who had styled themselves the Third Church in Boston.

The site chosen for the new Meeting-House was by the side of the Charles River, which in those days at high tide came up to the bottom of the Hill. (Hence the name of "River Street," which runs along the western side of the

building.) Tradition has it that this site was chosen so that believers could be immersed in the Charles.

II

The Meeting-House was constructed from designs by Asher Benjamin (1773–1845). Whether or not Benjamin personally supervised the construction of the building is not known; but we do know that in those days more was left to the discretion of the builders than is now customary.

The following works are among those known to have been designed by Benjamin: the staircase of the State House in Hartford, Connecticut (1795), the Hollister house and the Leavitt house in Greenfield, Massachusetts (both in 1796), the West Church Meeting-House, Boston (1806), the fourth building of the First Church in Boston (1808), the Fourth Meeting-House in Northampton, Massachusetts (1810), the Rhode Island Union Bank in Newport, Rhode Island (1817), and the houses situated at 92, 94 and 98 Bowdoin Street, 51 Chestnut Street, 58 Spruce Street, and 9 West Cedar Street, Boston. In addition, the following buildings are attributed to him: the Rufus Colton house at Agawam, Massachusetts, the Alexander house and the Carew house in Springfield, Massachusetts, and two dwelling houses in Windsor, Vermon. (The Alexander house has just become the thirty-ninth acquisition of The Society For The Preservation Of New England Antiquities.) But it was through his plan-books and other publications that Benjamin exercised his greatest influence on the architecture of New England. Throughout this region architects and master builders frequently consulted his works. Benjamin published at least six of them: *Country Builder's Assistant* (1805), *American Builder's Companion* (1806), *Rudiments of Architecture* (1814), *Practical House Carpenter* (1830), *Practice of Architecture* (1833), and *The Builder's Guide* (1839). In 1917, a reprint of his principal works, including plates and text, was published under the editorship of A. Embury, II.

The exterior of the Charles Street Meeting-House, as built, looked very much as it does today, except that the roof did not have as high a pitch. The interior, however, has been greatly changed. The floor of the auditorium was originally several feet lower than it is now. There was a fairly high pulpit, perhaps of mahogany, and behind it an elaborate arrangement of draped curtains. The gallery, supported by slender Grecian columns, extended around the sides and back of the auditorium. The organ was in the rear of the gallery. The pews were of the box pew variety, their sides topped with some dark wood, probably mahogany. The dominant color of the whole was white, relieved by the darker color of the pulpit, the organ, and the tops of the pews.

III

Rev. Caleb Blood was the first minister, remaining at the church for nearly three years, laboring "with good acceptance." Injuries and illness prevented him from continuing his ministry in Boston after this brief period, and these afflictions compelled him to resign his charge.

In 1811, Rev. Daniel Sharp, an Englishman by birth, accepted the leadership of the Charles Street Baptist Church. His early history is of interest. His father was a Baptist clergyman in England, but he himself originally joined an Independent

Church. Subsequently, however, he too became a Baptist. In 1805, he was engaged by a commercial house in Yorkshire to come to this country as their agent ("factor"). Shortly after his arrival, he became a lay preacher, and soon afterwards began to study for the ministry with a divine in Philadelphia. Ordained in 1809, he visited New England that same year and preached for Rev. Mr. Blood. In 1810, after Mr. Blood's resignation, he was invited to supply the vacancy. He declined, but when the invitation was renewed, the following year, he visited the church once more and decided to accept. The official installation did not occur until the spring of 1812.

Dr. Sharp's ministry lasted forty-two years, until his death in 1853—a long period of service, gratefully remembered by those he served. It was a strong ministry, rewarded by the almost universal respect of the people of Boston, and by many honors and posts of responsibility. He became president of the American Baptist Missionary Union, and president of the Board of Trustees of the Newton Theological Seminary. He was elected a fellow of Brown University, which honored him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1828. He was also elected an overseer of Harvard College, which in 1843 bestowed on him the same degree.

In the middle of the 1850's, shortly after Dr. Sharp's death, the congregation decided to make certain radical changes in the construction of the building, with a view to introducing parish rooms. The floor of the auditorium being near the level of the street, it was found necessary to raise the floor several feet above its old level. This, of course, made necessary a reconstruction of the auditorium. The architectural taste of the day was greatly inferior to what it had been fifty years before, and the changes made in the auditorium were most unfortunate. The room was converted from the classical New England Meeting-House auditorium it had been to the ugly room we have today. The old box pews were replaced by slip pews of the type universally popular in mid-Victorian days. Pseudo-Norman columns, with pseudo-Norman arches between them, supported the galleries, and in the rear was a large box for the choir and the organ console. Then, or shortly afterwards, a platform replaced the dignified pulpit that had served Mr. Blood and Dr. Sharp. It is not known what became of the pulpit.

These changes made it necessary to raise the pitch of the roof, and to alter the windows on all three sides of the main portion of the structure. Sketches of the building indicate that the lower windows were then equal in shape and size to those above. In the course of the restoration, the upper windows were projected downward by approximately three feet, and the lower windows were correspondingly shortened.

It was probably at this time that the exterior of the building, with its beautiful brickwork, was covered with the depressing brown paint that remained on it until the early 1920's. Apparently the people of those days knew of no better way to protect the brickwork against the rain, so much may be forgiven them; but it is unfortunate that such a dull color was chosen.

IV

To the end of Dr. Sharp's ministry the Charles Street Church had remained in a prosperous condition. After his death, however, the church fell on less prosperous days. One reason for this changed condition of affairs was, of course, the

Rev. Daniel Sharp, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE CHARLES STREET BAPTIST CHURCH FROM 1811 TO 1853

establishment of new Baptist churches in other parts of the city. Another was a change in the character of the population thereabouts; for little by little, the Negro population of Beacon Hill had crept down from the northern slope over towards Charles Street.

The members of the church had long shown a sympathetic understanding of the problems of colored people. Meetings

were held in the Meeting-House in the interest of the abolition of slavery, and among the distinguished orators who spoke there for the freedom of the slaves were William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth.

When it became necessary for the Baptists to sell the Meeting-House, it was natural that they should wish to sell it to a Negro congregation. Accordingly, with the assistance of many other white neighbors, it was sold in 1876 to the First African Methodist Episcopal Society, of which Rev. William H. Hunter was then the pastor. This society is believed to be the oldest colored church in New England. It was probably founded in the 1780's, and from the beginning has numbered among its members many of the leaders of the Negro race in Boston. The Women's Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in the Meeting-House, and also the first Christian Endeavor group among colored people. Sarah Gorham, most famous of all Negro missionaries to Africa, went out from that church. And there, in 1889, was founded the National Association of Colored Women. Two of the pastors of the church became bishops: Rev. William F. Dickerson and Rev. Reverdy C. Ransom.

In 1920, the City of Boston decided to widen Charles Street by taking a strip of land approximately ten feet in width from the western side of the street. This decision produced a crisis in the affairs of the church, particularly as an offer had been made for the property by a group which was interested only in the land and would undoubtedly have torn down the Meeting-House immediately upon its purchase. Thanks largely to the efforts of Dr. William Worthy, a member of the congregation, a group of white neighbors on the Hill was organized to save the venerable landmark. These neighbors, under the leadership of the late Frank A. Bourne, were able to persuade the congregation not to sell the property, and to permit the removal of the building ten feet to the westward and the restoration of the exterior. The cost of removal was met largely from the price paid by the city for the strip of land taken in widening. The cost of restoring the exterior, about $15,000, was met by contributions from Beacon Hill and Back Bay neighbors. This restoration, made under Mr. Bourne's skillful guidance, brought back the exterior to approximately the same appearance it had when built. The original shape of the windows was not restored, to be sure; the pitch of the roof remained, and so did the metal casing which for long had covered the columns of the cupola. But the paint was carefully removed from the beautiful brickwork, the low flight of stone steps reappeared in front of the tower, and balustrades and urns were once more placed on the balconies on the east and west sides of the clock chamber.

The colored people had found it necessary to give a mortgage, which by this time had reached the sum of $30,000. A committee consisting of Messrs. Edward R. Warren, Edward C. Wheeler, Jr., and Frank A. Bourne undertook to raise subscriptions to carry the interest on the mortgage and succeeded in this for some years, through the aid of eighteen persons who each gave $100 annually. The depression put an end to this arrangement.

In the meantime, the Beacon Hill Association and a committee of ladies, headed by Mrs. Bourne, raised approxi-

mately $3,000 for the erection of a steel truss and other essential repairs in the upper part of the brick tower. For some years the committee of ladies, now under the joint leadership of Mrs. Bourne and Mrs. Henry W. Montague, also raised the money necessary to keep the clock wound and oiled—a responsibility which was later assumed for over a year by the Beacon Hill Association.

In spite of the financial support and friendly interest of many of the neighbors, including The Society For The Preservation Of New England Antiquities, a permanent solution for the problem of the Meeting-House had not yet been reached. The owners of the building were moving to other parts of Greater Boston. They were obviously unable to pay interest on their large mortgage, and at times were unable to pay even for repairs and painting of the exterior. The situation was a discouraging one. Over $30,000 had already been spent on the building by its neighbors, and its future was still in doubt.

Early in 1934, Mr. John Gardner Greene offered a solution to the problem. He proposed that the owners should give him a five-year option on the property, which he would exercise as soon as the financial situation of the country had improved, and would then establish therein a new religious society and neighborhood centre. With the assistance of Messrs. Bourne, Warren, Romney Spring (then president of the Beacon Hill Association), Roger Ernst and Henry R. Brigham, he succeeded in obtaining this option in December, 1934. Shortly thereafter, the Charles Street Church Preservation Committee was organized to carry on the work of the Warren-Wheeler-Bourne Committee. Mr. Greene was the chairman, Mr. John Codman, the treasurer, and the other members were Miss Marian C. Nichols, Mr. Bourne and Mr. Brigham. Miss Nichols and Mr. Codman were appointed to the committee by the Beacon Hill Association. Miss Nichols was later succeeded by Mrs. William Phelps Allis; and when Mr. Bourne died, his place on the committee was taken by the late Arthur W. Wellington.

Meanwhile, Mr. Greene set about planning for a permanent solution of the problem along the lines laid down when he secured his option. Two well-established church federations were approached (one including all the Protestant churches of Massachusetts), and asked if they would be willing to take the building over, provided certain activities were carried on in it, at least for a while. Each of these organizations carefully considered the proposition and declined it, for financial reasons. The Society For The Preservation Of New England Antiquities asserted its willingness to take over the property provided it could be made self-supporting and free of debt.

It became obvious, however, that the only solution consistent with the proper use of the building was the formation of a new organization to take the property over. Accordingly, the Charles Street Meeting-House Society was organized in December, 1937. The incorporators were Professor J. A. C. Fagginger Auer, Mr. Henry R. Brigham, Miss Frances G. Curtis, Miss Isobel V. Duguid, Mr. John Gardner Greene, Mr. Carl T. Keller and Mrs. Arthur A. Shurcliff. Miss Curtis was elected the first president of the Society. The following year, Mrs. Shurcliff became president. Mr. Brigham has served as the Society's treasurer and legal adviser since the beginning. Subsequent to its incorporation, Miss Dorothy Bartol, Professor Henry J. Cadbury, Mr. Ray-

mond Dennett, Rev. Emerson Hugh Lalone, and Dr. William Worthy have joined the Society, which now has ten members.

This organization is a group of religious liberals, unofficially representing six different denominations. At present, five of the ten members live in the neighborhood of the Meeting-House, the others residing in other parts of the Boston area. It was the object of the Society to purchase the building, preserve it worthily, and to use it for religious and educational activities that would not compete with those of other organizations. Trustees are elected by the Corporation to hold in trust, subject to certain restrictions, all real estate and permanent funds of the Society. The trustees from the beginning have been Messrs. Henry R. Brigham, F. Hartwell Greene and John Gardner Greene.

In April, 1938, the First African Methodist Episcopal Society voted to accept the following proposition of the Charles Street Meeting-House Society: The two societies would jointly raise enough money to purchase, for the use of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, the St. Ansgarius property in Roxbury, at the corner of Warren Street and Elm Hill Avenue. The Meeting-House Society would then purchase that property from the Episcopal City Mission, and turn it over to the colored people in exchange for the Charles Street Meeting-House.

A drive was conducted, but inasmuch as certain commitments of the Society had to be met, it was necessary to borrow more than $6000 to take advantage of the generous offer of the Episcopal City Mission, which then owned the St. Ansgarius property. On May 31, 1939, the Meeting-House became the property of the Charles Street Meeting-House Society, and the St. Ansgarius property became the new home of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church. A fortunate solution had thus been reached to a decades-old problem. The future of the building is assured, inasmuch as the two small and inconspicuous shops in the basement and the occasional use of the two halls and parlor bring in enough rental to care for most of the charges of maintenance. There remains, however, much of the indebtedness incurred by the Society when it purchased the property; and there also remain two mortgages: one, of $30,000, given the Boston Five Cents Savings Bank, and the other, a non-interest-bearing second mortgage of $3,000 given the Beacon Hill Association. Contributions are badly needed to reduce this heavy indebtedness. They may be sent to the treasurer, Henry R. Brigham, 53 State Street, Boston.

V

Such has been the chequered but worthy past of the Charles Street Meeting-House. A future is planned for it which shall be worthy of its past. There will be a program of activities, religious, educational and musical, all self-supporting, it is hoped, but none of them competing with the activities of the churches, forums and schools of Boston. The Charles Street Meeting-House will continue to be of use to the community, and to make glad the hearts of those who cherish the monuments of the greatest period of our New England architecture.

Courtesy H. A. B. S.

The Congregational Church at Head Tide, Maine

VIEW TAKEN FROM THE SOUTHEAST

The Congregational Church at Head Tide, Maine

Built in 1838

By Frank Chouteau Brown

In the little village of Head Tide, Maine, stands a small wooden church that is well worth a visit by those interested in early New England church architecture. It needs a close scrutiny of the map to locate Head Tide — a little hamlet on the Sheepscot River, in Alna, Lincoln County, about midway between Dresden Mills and Bunker Hill.

To reach Head Tide one should follow the coastal highway, northeast beyond Bath, to the lovely old town of Wiscasset, and there turn north and begin to climb into the hills, skirting either side of the little Sheepscot River. Following the right-hand bank to the west the traveller passes near another old village centre — Alna — well known to architects and students for its fine old meeting-house and its unusual little schoolhouse, both of which were included in the measurements of the Historic American Buildings Survey a few years ago. The old Alna meeting-house, with its "hitching rail" still standing around three sides, crowns an elevation just above the old schoolhouse, from which can be seen, about two miles farther north, the white tower of the Head Tide church. The Alna meeting-house was built in 1789 and is of the two-story, plain, square, earlier type, but without a tower. Fortunately it is well kept up and preserved by its own community.

Head Tide and Alna are in the same township, and it is perhaps partly due to this that the Head Tide church has been deserted and unused for many years, despite the fact that at the western foot of the hill is a clustering group of old houses, several shops and the usual "general store," as well as a sawmill still in active operation. The hillsides around the larger valley are dotted with farms and farm buildings, with a goodly number of small houses scattered along the wandering roads that wind about seeking the lesser gradients in mounting the surrounding hills. The whole outlook is as typically rural and restful as can be found even much farther away from the coast and the more populous and used thoroughfares of the Maine countryside. It is a country that should meet the mysterious needs of the "summer people," or even of the artist groups, which go so far afield in search of peaceful quiet and a country background for their vacation land.

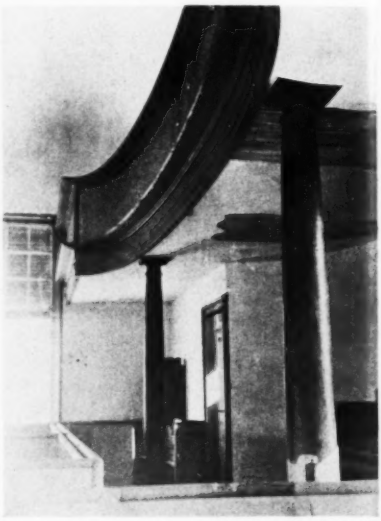
The Head Tide church faces south, on the summit of a steep hill remaining from an early glacial movement. One side of the hill was at some time cut down to allow for the level roadbed of an old single-track railroad, now long disused and overgrown. This cut discontinued one road approaching the church from the west, and now it can be reached only from the east, after entering the village and crossing the bridge. The accompanying view shows the church from this side taken near the foot of the hill.

The church was built in 1838, but without the tower, which the construction shows to have been added at a slightly later date. It was originally used as a Congregational church and still contains all the essentials of worship, including the hymnals, foot stools, library,

bible and furniture of its last occupation. A few bits of plaster have fallen from the ceiling and walls, but the frame of the building is sound and strong, and the church belongs to an interesting period of which comparatively few examples remain so unchanged on the interior as is the case here. On its bell-deck is a bell, cast by the Paul Revere Foundry, that may have been taken from some earlier structure.

Outside, the simple details of the tower and the pointed windows indicate the slight concessions that were at that time being made by its builders to the incoming tradition of the English Gothic. In 1838 classical tradition, in larger cities more to the south in New England, had been supplanted by the neo-Greek for at least a dozen or twenty years, but this existing Maine example still shows on its south front the classical pilastered colonnade, broken by the unusually closely related entrance doorways and balcony window locations, while the mouldings and details are reservedly, but definitely, Greek. The tower must have been added soon after the main body of the structure was built, as it retains the round classical arches of the bell-story, with a Gothic pierced balustrade and nicely proportioned spire above.

Inside, the structure appears of earlier date, although many of the mouldings and the south balcony face were definitely influenced by the Greek feeling of the period in which it was built. But in this remote example these details were still held in refinement and check by the earlier delicacy "carried over" from the preceding late "Colonial" period, to which only the box pews and seatings, the square-topped windows (the pointed window tops are exterior only) and the painted arched "false" window back of



Courtesy H. A. B. S.

Detail of Choir Balcony and Entrance End of Head Tide Church

the pulpit belong in their entirety, even though the wood frame surrounding the painted window drapery employs Greek sections for its moulding outlines. The elliptical lengthwise arch of the plaster ceiling also suggests the earlier influence, while, in detail, it is again Greek. The columns that support the end balcony are Colonial, although the moulded face above them is paneled and railed with moulding sections, once more definitely Greek.

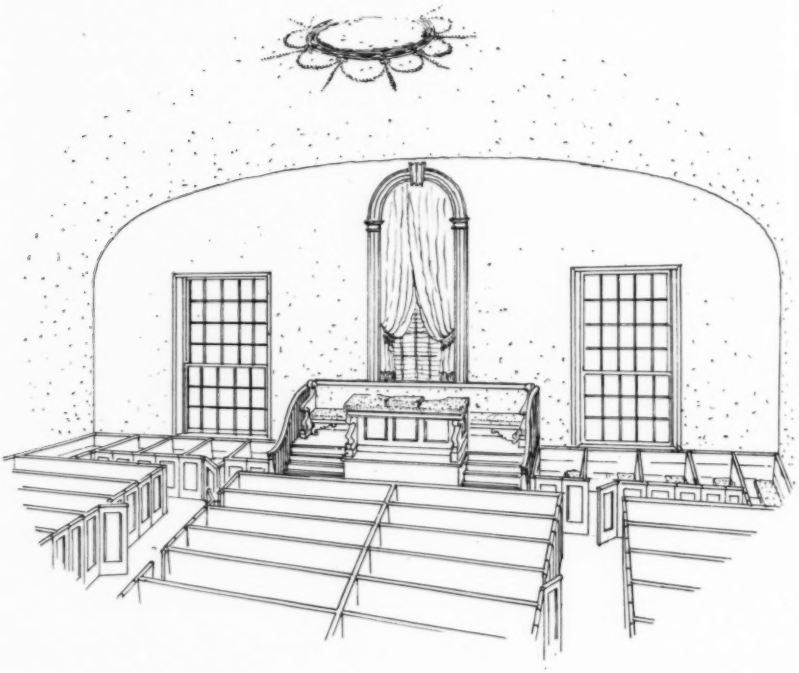
Perhaps of most interest is the pulpit—as fine an example of simple early American Empire grained treatment as can be recalled. It helps to fill that almost empty break between the earlier high Colonial church pulpits, with their steep flights of stairs on either side and sounding boards above, and the later, and still lower, Greek type, to which this one actually be-

Courtesy H. A. B. S.

Pulpit of the Head Tide Church showing Painted Arched Window

longs. It is to be regretted that the snapshots of the interior do not show to advantage the whole effect of the church, or include its box pews instead of details of its interior alone. The accompanying drawing may help to bring together some of the different elements mentioned and better suggest the truly harmonious effect of the whole.

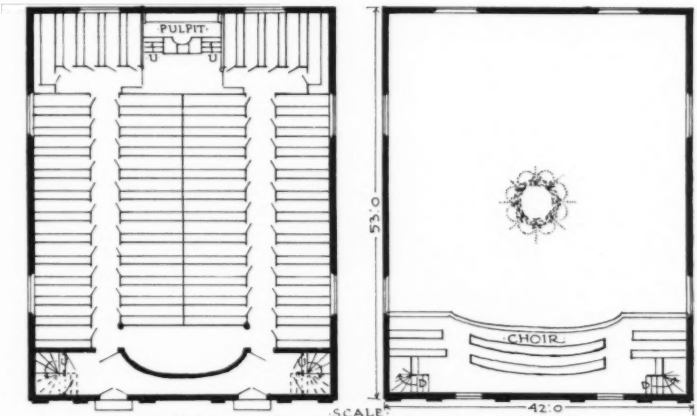
With this the tale is told, but if a moral is needed to adorn it, that might be had in telling of the extremely small expenditure and slight effort that would be required to bring this church — and possibly its congregation — again to life. Attendance might not survive during the long, cold winter season, but there must be a goodly part of the old congregation left in whom to revive, at least in the summer months, a spark of interest in the structure that remains so conveniently in their midst, if only they might see some appreciation shown by visitors from without their hamlet, representing the larger interests of the modern world. This might be evinced by a few special summer services featuring visiting preachers, or perhaps the whole congregation of a Wiscasset Congregational Society could be transported to nearby Head Tide for a Sunday in mid-summer. It might need no more than that — along with a few contributions to pay for cleaning the interior and repairing the outside. But no attempt should be made to retouch the interior, particularly the



Historic American Buildings Survey made October 13, 1939

This sketch of the interior shows the relation of the pulpit end to the pews, the elliptical barrel-vaulted arch of the old plaster ceiling, the square-headed windows that show upon the interior, the "blind" arch back of the pulpit with its painted drapery and sash and shutters, along with the late plaster ceiling centre piece above. The latter also carries a cast iron central kerosene lamp chandelier, while bracket lamps to match are disposed along the walls.

It is most unusual to find in original, unaltered condition, as we do here, the marbleized platform, the grained "American Empire" style pulpit, with red velvet cover and reading rest, and the sofa-type seat against the wall behind it.

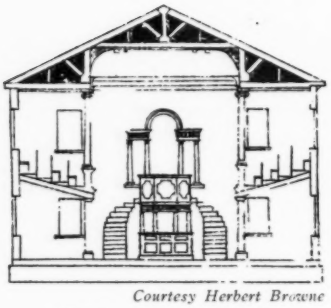


·FLOOR PLANS·
·CHURCH·AT·HEAD·TIDE·
·MAINE·

Historic American Buildings Survey made October 13, 1939

The seating shows boxed-end pews, with door, but of the proportions and arrangement of the open-end pews that came in almost immediately following this date. This marks the transition from the earlier type of square box-pews, which some of the earlier churches and meeting-houses of the preceding century still retain.

old graining of the pulpit and the painted window behind it, which it would be so difficult to secure or replace today. The few spots of broken plaster could easily be repaired, once the leaks in the roof were found and made tight, and then the doors should be relocked. Thus the neighbors might realize that their church life here could well be renewed, because of these evidences of interest and appreciation, even if first produced and inaugurated by the "summer people."



Courtesy Herbert Browne

Design for a Church

A CROSS-SECTION

PUBLISHED IN 1797 BY ASHER BENJAMIN

Personal Recollections of the Precinct Congregational Church in Lakeville, Massachusetts, in 1850

By Mrs. Jane Montgomery Seaver

THIS meeting-house was built in 1835, to replace the one which was erected in 1759. Land was not very valuable in that locality, and the committee selected what they called a suitable spot for the new church. They had the foundation laid, the church raised and well under way when someone discovered that they had built it on the boundary line between two towns and two counties. It was said that the line ran between the pulpit and the pews, so that the minister stood in Taunton, Bristol County, and preached to a congregation in Middleboro (now Lakeville), Plymouth County.

The small white meeting-house, with steeple, belfry, and bell, stood alone on the road with the exception of the parsonage and a square old-fashioned two-story house occupied by a genial deacon. On the front of the church were two doors, painted green, opening into the narrow entry, where two doors opposite these led to the audience room. A flight of winding stairs at each end of the entry ascended to the gallery or "singers' seats," which faced the high, mahogany pulpit, with its red velvet cushion, on which rested the Bible and the red-covered book of hymns and psalms. At the back of the pulpit was a long, hair-cloth covered seat, with a cane-seat chair at each end. There were two chairs of the same kind at the ends of the table on the platform below. The aisles, platform, and stairs were carpeted alike, but the people owned their pews and furnished their own cushions and carpets. Each pew had a door, which, after all the family had entered, was closed and fastened with a brass button.

Precinct Congregational Church Lakeville, Massachusetts
BUILT IN 1835

In the winter two box stoves stood in the entry, with long pipes which went through holes in the wall and down the length of the auditorium, and into the chimneys at either side of the pulpit. Wood was burned in the stoves, which often smoked. The pipes contained any quantity of soot, and the dampness caused them to leak, sending a dark-colored liquid down on the whitewashed walls and painted pews. At a parish meeting it was voted to get some tin pans and fasten

them with wire under the joints in the pipes. My grandfather approved the plan, for he said he didn't like sitting under such "dropping of the sanctuary" as had been falling on him. The stoves and pipes were expected to warm the whole church, but occasionally some old lady would bring a footstove, filled with hot coals, or perhaps a hot brick to put under her feet. The women seldom had occasion to unpin their shawls or to loosen their cloaks or their fur tippets, and they usually kept their hands in their big fur muffs all through the service. Some of the elderly people, with poor circulation, would perhaps take a good dose of hot drops before starting for meeting.

They went with the old farm horse and covered wagon, which had no springs (neither wagon nor horse had springs) and was hung on what were called "thorough braces," and how they would rattle over the rough country roads! Those who sat on the front seat would have a buffalo robe or a heavy blanket before them in winter, but the women on the back seat were supposed to keep warm enough with their extra shawls and long, green barege veils.

In the summer the church doors, windows, and blinds were wide open, in order that the sunlight and air might have full play. The quiet stillness of the hour was seldom disturbed by the rumbling of passing carriages, but there was occasionally the stamping of uneasy horses in the adjacent sheds. The singing of the birds, the sound of the cricket, the busy bee, or the katydid, and the distant tinkling of cowbells helped to divert the young minds and were perhaps as attentively listened to as was the solemn sermon proclaimed from the pulpit in stentorian tones. Everyone went to meeting on Sunday: old men, old women, young men and maidens, and little children, whom their mothers were obliged to take, or stay at home. It was very tiresome for the little ones to sit through a long sermon, not able to touch the floor with their feet, but sometimes they could rest them on a little four-legged wooden cricket, and if they pressed a little heavily on one end, over it would go and disturb the silence of the house. A little girl at one time had become very tired after being in church for two long services, and near the end of the afternoon meeting she whispered to her mother, "Isn't it most time for him to say, 'Holy Ghost, Amen'?"

Sunday was a long, tiresome day for the children, whose playthings were put away on Saturday night, not to be taken out till Monday morning. Even the accordion, the only musical instrument in many homes, was placed on the upper shelf, for fear it might strike up the familiar strains of "Yankee Doodle" on the Lord's day, and they must remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Go to church in the morning, Sunday School from twelve to one, stay through the afternoon service, then go home tired and so hungry! After dinner they could study the next Sunday School lesson and read the old, old stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Daniel in the lions' den, and how

> "Zaccheus he
> Did climb the tree
> His Lord to see."

It is no wonder that they gladly welcomed bed-time, and probably they rejoiced that congregations did break up and Sabbaths had an end.

The meeting-house bell was rung at nine o'clock on Sunday morning, and those within hearing distance would set their clocks and watches and feel sure

that they had the correct time. The bell was tolled for a death in the parish. When a person was very sick and not expected to live, people who were interested (and nearly everyone was interested) would listen at sunrise and sunset for the bell to toll and would slowly and solemnly count the strokes. At one time, when I was quite young, I spent the night with a cousin who lived near the church in a neighboring town. At the rising of the sun, the bell tolled the age of a very old man who had died during the night. We began to count, and we counted bell after bell until it reached ninety-five, ninety-six, and when it struck ninety-seven my cousin exclaimed, "Why! they are tolling that bell for Methuselah." I must say her remark somewhat marred the solemnity of the occasion.

Funerals were seldom held in the church but rather at the home of the departed and were made just as solemn as possible. I remember one old minister who always opened the service in this way: "We will now commence the service on this solemn occasion by reading the ninetieth Psalm. 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away'." I heard Maud Howe Elliott say not long ago that these words had caused more deaths than all the diseases. Singing at funerals was unheard of at this time, and I remember that later it caused quite a sensation when there was a funeral in town at which two or three members of the church choir sang. Afterwards one woman said to another, "Did you know that they had singing at that funeril?" "Why no," was the reply, "what did they sing?" "Well," she said, "I couldn't understand a word, but they sang to the tune of 'Boylston'." "Well!" said the other old lady, "I think it's very much out of place to holler and sing at a funeril." I was one of the singers. The Sunday after a funeral, every member of the family who could possibly go to meeting would be found in the pew, though perhaps none of them had been there for three or four years, or since the last funeral. The family would send a note to the parson, requesting the prayers of the church, which he would announce in this way, supposing it was the wife and mother who had died: "John Smith and family request the prayers of this church that the death of his wife and their mother may be sanctified to them for their spiritual good. Thomas Jones and family join in the request." It is safe to say that the sermon that morning would be shortened on account of the length of the prayer.

The minister was paid $600 a year and had the rent of the house and farm, which was considered equal to $400 more. He raised his own vegetables, cut (or hired cut) his firewood, had quite a little mowing land, and raised hay, corn, etc., enough to keep his horse and cow during the winter. He was expected to hold two services on Sunday and to hold a meeting "at early candlelight" in one of the schoolhouses of the parish, perhaps two or three miles away. Every Thursday evening there was a meeting for exhortation, prayer, and singing, in the schoolhouse near the church, where about fifteen or twenty persons would congregate. The minister would call on different ones for remarks or a "season of prayer," and several hymns would be sung. The deacon, who always sat in the front seat, would look at the hymn which had been read and would name the tune, which would usually be Amsterdam, Coronation, Mear, Boylston, or Marlow. One old

man who occasionally went to the Thursday evening meeting would sit until nearly the close of the meeting, then rise, take a long breath, and begin telling the people what great sinners they were. Poor feeble worms of the dust, he called them, unworthy to call on His great and holy name. They must repent, be baptized, and join the church. Then he would say, "COME, come NOW. It is the accepted time and day of salvation. Life is the time to *serve* the Lord, the time to insure His great reward, and while the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return." We never thought of laughing at this old man—indeed we did not. What would my father and mother say if they heard me tell this!

Our minister would sometimes exchange with the neighboring pastors, such noted divines as Rev. Mr. Gay of Scotland, Mr. Sanford of Raynham, Mr. Eastman of Berkley, Mr. Duncan of Assonet, and good old Dr. Putnam of Middleboro, who was noted for his long prayers. If the congregation was standing when he closed his eyes in prayer he usually found them sitting when he had finished.

The hour at noon, between the sermons, was devoted to the Sunday School. As soon as the morning service was over, the children would hurry out of their seats for a little recreation before they were called back. Not many minutes would elapse, however, before the dapper little superintendent would go to the front of the pulpit and say, "Sabbath School scholars will please take their places." It was very unusual to see a grown person reciting the Sunday School lesson. The older women would get together and talk over the news of the week. The men would assemble in the horse sheds and talk over their planting, haying, or harvesting, and the Sunday before the March Town Meeting, politics would hold sway. When Sabbath School was over, the children would rush out for a few minutes to eat their light luncheon, a cracker or two, which they carried in their pockets or in little work-bags, and perhaps would go to the parson's house for a refreshing drink of water from the northeast corner of the well. The little girls would often go back to meeting with a few wild flowers, but they would soon tire of holding these in their hands and would throw them into the wooden box of sand or sawdust which stood in the corner of the pew near the entrance.

The singers sat in the gallery at the back of the auditorium and were partly hidden from view by short red curtains, which were sewed to rings and drawn along on a wire. The hymn or psalm from the old church Psalmody was read by the parson. It might be,

"Hark, from the tombs a doleful sound,
Mine ears attend the cry!
Ye living men, come view the ground
Where you must shortly lie.
Princes, this clay must be your bed,
In spite of all your towers.
The tall, the wise, the reverend head
Must lie as low as ours."

Or perhaps,

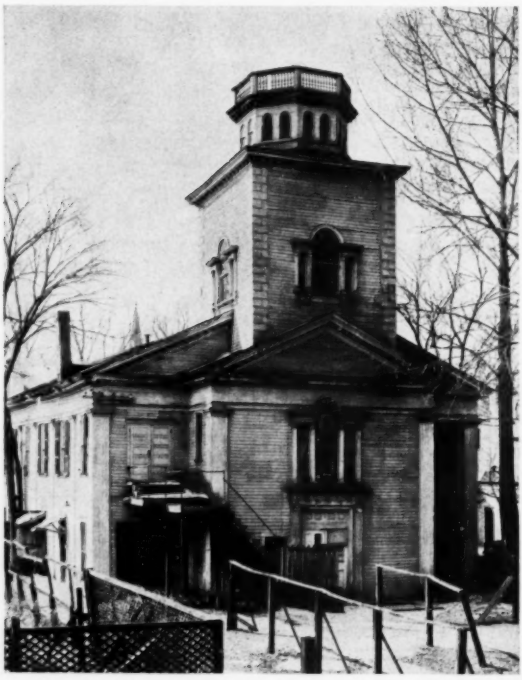
"Before Jehovah's awful throne
Ye nations bow with sacred joy.
Know that the Lord is God alone,
He can create and He destroy."

A big bass viol and two violins furnished instrumental music. After the strings and screws were twisted and squeaked to the right pitch, the congregation arose and faced the choir, and the singing commenced. Nearly all who could sing, even a little, sat in the singers' seats.

There were no calendars passed to the people as they entered the church, no army of young men passed plates or long-handled boxes for contributions every Sunday. Occasionally a collection would be taken for some charity. The minister would state the case or the object and would say, "A collection will now be taken. The deacons will please pass their hats. Will Brother Leach pass the hat in gallery?" I well remember the thud of the big copper cent as it went down into the depths of the deacon's tall hat, which was always the same style, and probably the same hat.

The first pews at each side of the pulpit were called the "free pews." They were seldom occupied, since nearly all had their own seats. In one of the wing pews at the right sat the senior deacon and his estimable wife wearing her black velvet bonnet in winter and one of steel-colored drawn silk, with white strings without spot or blemish, in the summer. Another respected deacon sat about midway of the church on the left-hand side. He and his good wife and their family of little boys, were seldom absent from the church services, although they lived three miles and a half away. The deacon always sat at the head of the pew, by the door, except when the boys got to playing. Then he would move up and very quietly put the roguish boy at the pew door, and order would reign again. I well remember, after the deacon's boys were quite well grown, being at a meeting of the Ladies' Benevolent Society, when one of the old ladies present said to the deacon's wife, "I hear one of your boys is going to college." She answered, "Yes, he is going to Harvard." "To Harvard!" the other exclaimed, "Why, I always thought that was a Unitarian school." The deacon's wife said, "Yes, it is, and Father strongly objected on that account, but he finally reluctantly consented, and George is going to Harvard." It nearly took the old lady's breath away to think that the son of an orthodox deacon should be fitting for Harvard College.

At the left of the pulpit I can see the dignified president of the Ladies Benevolent Society, with her large feather fan with ivory handles, which she waved back and forth so majestically and moderately as hardly to produce a breath of air. I remember many other good men and women, whom I like to think of, who were seldom absent from church on the Sabbath and who have long since gone to their reward. If they should come back to the little white meeting-house, see the changes here, and see the automobiles and electric cars pass the door, I am sure they would think the millennium was at hand.



The so-called Bulfinch Church, Pittsfield, Massachusetts
BUILT 1790–93 — DEMOLISHED IN THE FALL OF 1939

This issue of OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND was planned primarily to help those having at heart the preservation of this church. It was hoped that the story of the restoration of the meeting-house at Bennington, Vermont, would serve as an inspiration to the friends of the church at Pittsfield and to those having in charge the reconstruction of the old meeting-house at Lebanon, Connecticut, as well as to friends of the old church at Head Tide, Maine. Unfortunately, the Bulfinch church at Pittsfield was destroyed while the magazine was in preparation. It seems almost incredible that in this age of art appreciation a church designed by one of America's most famous architects should have been so sacrificed. May its fate serve as a warning to friends of other old churches and meeting-houses that still survive.